

40 Verses on Reality - “Ulladu Narpadu”

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Preface

It was not without much hesitation that I acceded to the suggestion of one or two of my friends to prepare a simplified translation of Sri Bhagavan's ULLADU NARPADU, or *Forty Verses on Reality*, which newcomers to Sri Ramanasram, especially the English-speaking foreigners who come in increasing numbers might more easily understand.

It is generally admitted that Sri Bhagavan's ideas are often beyond the reach of the common reader and the beginner. They are made more difficult by his Tamil mode of expression and by the spontaneity with which he wrote the individual verses, for it was not his intention to produce a compact philosophical system or thesis. He wrote the verses as they occurred to him, and they were later arranged by a disciple in the order in which we see them in print.

When undertaking this venture, I placed before me six different English translations, chose the versions common to the majority of them, and wrote these down in an almost conversational English. I avoided technical terms and difficult words so far as this could be done while remaining faithful to the original. When I had a doubt due to lack of agreement between the different translators, I sought the help of Tamil scholars in Vellore.

I also wrote brief notes on each verse, developing the verse's main points so that in some places the notes read like a paraphrase, but without learned quotations or long dissertations. For all that seekers (*sadhakas*) need and want is to understand the spirit of Bhagavan's utterances and apply it in their spiritual practice (*sadhana*).

In these forty verses, as the reader will observe, Bhagavan has touched on all the salient points of his teaching, constantly stressing the great value and efficacy of the *vichara*, or investigation into the nature of the investigator himself. All the Masters of the Upanishads maintain that man is not the elements out of which his body is made, but the mind, or intelligent principle,

or being, which uses the body. *That* is the serene blissful Self, the absolute, secondless Reality, which all are seeking consciously and unconsciously in different ways – devious or straight, wrong or right – and of which the *sadhaka* endeavors to have a direct and full Knowledge.

The synopsis which follows not only gives the gist of every verse, but is also intended to help the reader to locate a specific subject. It takes the place of an index, which seems out of place in a small work like this.

S.S. Cohen

Invocation

i. Awareness is the nature of Reality

Without awareness of Reality, can Reality exist? Because this awareness-reality, itself free from thought, exists as the source of all thoughts, it is called Heart. How to know it? To be as it is (thought-free) in the Heart, is to know it.

This verse and the next form the Invocation, which customarily precedes spiritual and poetic works in Indian literature. It may be addressed to a particular deity such as Ganapati, the *deva* in charge of poetic effusions, or to the *devas* in general, to a favorite *devi*, or to the guru or to one of the three major divinities. But Bhagavan, recognizing a single Reality from which all things proceed, makes his dedication to that, as the pure Awareness (*chit*) abiding in the Heart as external existence (*sat*), or the absolute Brahman.

The literal translation of the first sentence of this verse reads: “Can there be awareness of that which is other than existence?” This makes knowledge or awareness the criterion of existence, because the non-existent cannot make itself known. The color, for example, that is not visible, or the sound that is not audible, amount to nothing.

ii. Fear of death is the driving force behind the quest for immortality

Those who have an infinite fear of death take refuge in the Feet of the supreme Lord Who is without birth and death. Can the thought of death occur to those who have destroyed their “I” and “mine” and have become immortal?

Those who most identify themselves with the body are the people who fear death most. Seeing the dissolution of the body they deduce their own dissolution to be simultaneous with it, and dread the terrible Unknown that lurks behind it. Their only hope of safety lies, there, in the worship of the Almighty Lord, who alone is deathless.

But those who through the practice of *sadhana* or spiritual discipline have transcended this false identification no longer have bodies to be the victims of death. Even the thought of death does not occur to them. They are *videhas*, bodiless, although they continue to occupy a body.

This verse also implies that by taking refuge in the Lord, these fear-torn people will, in course of time, so progress spiritually that they will be able to destroy their sense of “I” and “mine” and attain immortality, since the death of the ego will evidently destroy death and the thought of death.

Text

1. Awareness is All — the seer and seen, the real and apparent.

Because the world is seen, we have to infer a common cause (a Lord) possessing unlimited powers to appear as the diversity. The pictures consisting of names and forms, the seer, the canvas, the light — all these are He Himself.

The Forty begins here. To understand Bhagavan's meaning we have to use the key with which he supplies us in the Invocation. There he declares Reality to be the thought-free Awareness which dwells in the heart. Here he brings in the world in order to meet on their own ground those disciples who do perceive a "real" external world. He is saying something like this: "You see a world and ascribe an omnipotent creator to it. But as we have already seen, this creation is only an appearance, a manifestation of that Awareness of which we were speaking. It has no more reality in itself than have the pictures projected on a screen." From the heart thoughts spontaneously rise, like vapor from the ocean, and turn into a kaleidoscopic world of names, forms, colors, sounds, smells and other impressions. These are in it, or on it as on a canvas of which the heart is itself the seer and the sight.

Pure Consciousness or Pure Mind is thus the pictures, the screen, the seer, and the light or sight.

2. The triad — God, soul and world — is the creation of the ego and disappears with the ego.

All schools of thought postulate the fundamental triad — God, soul and world — although all three are manifestations of the One. The belief that the three remain eternally lasts only as long as the “I” or ego lasts. To destroy the ego and remain in one’s own state is best.

Most religions are based on the assumption that the triad mentioned in the text is eternal. Bhagavan rejects this assumption as being the child of the ignorant ego which mistakes itself for the body. The “I-am-the-body” notion compels the admissions of an individuality (jiva), a world, its creator, as three distinct, perennial, co-existing entities. Bhagavan, as we have seen, perceives a single existence of which these three are an illusory manifestation which, however, vanishes the moment the eternal “I” is apprehended and the ego perishes.

3. Speculations about God and world avail nothing: Self-realization is the hearts cry of all.

Of what avail to debate whether the world is real or unreal, sentient or insentient, pleasant or unpleasant? Extinguishing the ego, transcending the world, realizing the Self — that is the state which is dear to all, and free from the sense of unity and duality.

The same line of thought continues. Destruction of the ego is a *sine qua non* for the realization of the Self within the heart. It brings to an end all speculation about reality and unreality, God and world, whose true nature will be revealed in actual experience. This is the most blissful attainable state and beyond the plurality of the illusory world.

4. Form and formlessness of God depend on the ego's conception of itself.

If the Self be with form, God and the world will be also. If one be formless oneself, how and by whom can their forms be seen? Can their be sight without eyes? The Self is the eye, the limitless Eye.

This refers to the *jnani*, who although having a body seem himself as bodiless and formless, and so cannot see God, or in fact see anything with form. The *ajnani* (the non-realized), perceiving himself as a body, takes God also to be a body and worships him in all sorts of material, formal representations. Yet the fact remains that even he perceives everything through his own formless Self, which we have granted to be the only seers, the only knowledge there is — the “limitless Eye”. Those who condemn idol-worship forget that they themselves worship material symbols and icons, and attribute to God forms, dimensions, positions, even sentiments and sense-perceptions exactly as they do to themselves. Having no experience or conception of a formless omniscient spirit, they feel literally lost at the idea of worshipping something not represented in a form. God, thus, appears according to the degree of realization of one's Self.

“Can there be sight without eyes?” means that without consciousness there can be no knowledge of anything, just as without a lamp none of the objects present in a dark room can be seen. Can there be a world to an unconscious man?

5. The world is the body inclusive of the five sheaths, for without them the world cannot be conceived (or perceived)

The body is in the form of, and includes, the 5 sheathes. Is there a world apart from the body? Has anyone without a body seen the world?

The body is a complex structure containing a large number of instruments or organs which the Self, as ego uses for a large number of purposes, including

among others those of hearing, smelling, seeing, thinking, feeling, memorizing and reasoning. The materials out of which these instruments or parts are made vary from the grossest to the finest. The *Shastras* (scriptures) have arranged them in five groups. To each group one sheath of *kosha* is assigned. The *kosha* dealing with purely physical matter is called *annamayakosha* (the sheath of food). The *pranamayakosha* (the vital sheath) looks after the fivefold functions of the vital energies — breathing, assimilation, generation, excretion and locomotion. The *manomayakosha* (mental sheath) contains the faculties of mentation. The *vijñanamayakosha* is the sheath of the intellectual and reasoning faculties, of scientific and philosophic thinking, and last is the *anandamayakosha*, the sheath of bliss, or causal sheath, which stores up within itself the karmic seeds of every birth and is concerned with that state in which profound peace is enjoyed by the dreamless sleeper. This *kosha* is made of the finest substance, *sattva*, which in itself is happy, due to its freedom from grossness and its close proximity to the blissful Self.

Thus the term body includes all these *koshas*, whose appearance and disappearance cause the appearance and disappearance of all objective and subjective perceptions. Assumption of a body is therefore necessary for the world's enjoyment and the body owes its existence, as we shall see in the next verse, to the five senses, which are the properties of the mind.

6. The world is what the mind conceives through the senses.

The world is but the fivefold sense-objects, which are the results of the five senses. Since the mind perceives the world through the senses, is there a world without the mind?

Through the sensory organs lodged in the five *koshas*, the senses display before the mind a variety of objects — physical, vital, emotional, mental and intellectual. Apart from the five sense perceptions, there all sorts of other internal senses which also arise from the mind, work through the mind, and are understood by the mind — such as the senses of time, of space, or “I” and “mine”, and the artistic, ethical, religious and spiritual senses for instance. Since all these senses form the world we known and have one common origin, which is the mind, the world cannot therefore be other than that mind.

7. The world rises and sets with the knowledge of it. Both have their source in the Self.

Although the world and the awareness of it rise and set together, it is by awareness that the world is known. The source from which they both rise, and into which they both set, always shines without itself rising or setting. That alone is real.

This verse is reminiscent of the Invocation and confirms the previous verse, which make awareness the criterion of existence as well as the source of the world. Awareness “always shines” as the “limitless Eye” mentioned in verse four, the eternal Knower. It goes without saying that the appearance of the world is simultaneous with the awareness of it, and disappearance of the world simultaneous with the withdrawal of that awareness. For the fact of the awareness of the world is the fact of its existence. We cannot affirm the existence of an object without first affirming awareness of it. Therefore awareness is the only Reality there is.

8. Any sincere worship eventually leads to Realization.

In whatever name and form the nameless and formless is worshiped, therein lies the path of its realization. Realizing one’s truth as the truth of that reality, and merging into it, is true realization.

All roads lead to Rome — all sincere worship comes from the heart, and leads to the formless God in the heart. To believe that one’s reality is the same as God’s is an important step towards the realization of Him as Pure Consciousness and the process of merging into Him. How many millions of innocent human beings would have been spared the horror of religious persecutions throughout the centuries in the name of God, and how many wars would have been prevented, had this truth been accepted as the one truth underlying all religions, the basic world faith!

9. The dyads and triads are supported by the One, which can be discovered by inquiry.

The dyads and triads rest on the basic One. Inquiring about that One in the mind, they will disappear. Those who see thus are the seers of truth: they remain unruffled.

The dyads are the pairs of opposites — knowledge and ignorance, light and darkness, happiness and misery, birth and death, etc. The triad is triple principle of seen, seer and sight; object, subject and the perception of the former by the latter. As all the numbers stand on, and originate from, the first number, so are the dyads and triads based on, arising from, and of the same nature as the one seer, the perceiving mind. He who realises the world as such retains a uniform serenity in all conditions of life.

10. Knowledge and ignorance are inter-related. Real knowledge arises by inquiring for whom both knowledge ignorance occur.

Knowledge and ignorance are interrelated: the one does not exist without the other. Inquiring to whom is it that knowledge and that ignorance, and arriving at their root cause, the Self, this is true knowledge.

To speak of ignorance is to admit its opposite — knowledge — and *vice versa*. Until we become aware of an object we remain ignorant of its existence. To learn a lesson is to admit our previous ignorance of its content. Knowledge is thus the light which clears away the darkness of ignorance. But knowledge and ignorance which pertain to external objects are mere modes of thought. They come and go, and are therefore of no consequence in the search for Truth. What is of consequence is their knower, who is fixed, changeless, also called first principle because he is efficient, causeless, the eternal thinker, who precedes and survives all his thoughts — “the basic One” (verse nine).

11. Not to seek the Self which is the source of knowledge and ignorance is real ignorance

Is it not ignorance to know all but the all-knowing Self? When the latter, the substratum of both knowledge and ignorance, is known, knowledge and ignorance themselves both disappear.

It is of course foolish to know about everything in the world, and remain ignorant of one's own Self. Knowledge of the perishable – the universe and its contents – perishes with the body, and cannot be transferred to another body, except perhaps as tendencies or abilities in the perishable too, which may not have any spiritual value in a future life. The imperishable alone endures and gives imperishable satisfaction, and this lies wholly within ourselves, who are the source and ground of both knowledge and ignorance – that is, of all experiences whatever.

12. True knowledge is self-effulgent: it is neither knowledge nor ignorance

True knowledge is neither knowledge or ignorance. Objective knowledge is not true knowledge. Because the Self is self-effulgent, having no second to know or be known, it is Supreme Knowledge – not empty nothingness.

This continues the theme of verses ten and eleven. We have seen that objective knowledge is knowledge of the perishable, the apparent, the non-existent, the unreal (see Invocation). Self-awareness is true knowledge, because it is absolute, i.e. changeless, non-dual, ever-pure (thought-free). This purity is not emptiness because of the lack of perceivable objectives in it, but the ever-shining plenum of Awareness-Being (*chit-Sat*).

13. Knowledge of diversity is ignorance, yet it is not apart from the Self, like the shapes of ornaments which are not apart from the gold.

The Self alone is knowledge, is truth. Knowledge of the diversity is ignorance, is false knowledge. Yet ignorance is not apart from the Self, which is knowledge. Are the ornaments different from the gold which is real?

So the world with all its multiplicity of shapes, colors, smells tastes and so forth is nothing but pure consciousness in substance, like variously-shaped jewelry which is nothing but gold. To perceive shapes, colors, smells and the like as different from one another is ignorance, is illusion, but to see them as the single substance out of which they are made – the pure mind – is true knowledge.

“Yet ignorance is not apart from the Self” because all experiences as thoughts come from the Self and are witnessed by it (verses six and seven).

14. “You” and “he” exist when the “I” exists. If the root of the “I” — the One — is found, “You” and “he” will also shine as the One.

The “I” existing, “you” and “he” also exist. If by investigating the truth of the “I” the “I” ceases, “you” and “he” will also cease and will shine as the One. This is the natural state of one’s being.

“You” and “he” are the world; it stands and falls with the “I” or ego, which constructs it. Realizing one’s being is realizing the whole world to be the same effulgent being – “the One”. This state of being is experienced by the Self-realized man in the waking state consciously and by all men in dreamless sleep. In dreamless sleep (sushupti), the “I”, like everything else, disappears and one remains in one’s native state – in the true “I” but generally without retaining memory of this condition on awakening.

15. Past and future are only the present when they occur, thus the present alone exists.

On the present the past and the future stand. They too are the present in their times. Thus the present alone exists. Ignoring the present, and seeking to know the past and the future, is like trying to count without the initial unit.

The present *is* always, for even the past was the present in its time, and so also will the future be the present in *its* time. Whatever happens therefore happens only in the present. When Methuselah was born, he was born in the present, and when he died after 9 or 10 centuries he died also in the present, despite the later date. Similarly all that happened to him between those two events happened also in the present. Thus the present is the only significant tense in actuality. Moreover, let us not forget the fact that time is made of instants which are so minute as to have no room either for a past or for a future, but for the present alone. The next verse will tell us that even the present is unreal, being one of the notions of our mind, as past and future are — acts of our memory.

16. Time and space do not exist apart from the Self.

Do time and space exist apart from us? If we are the body we are affected by time and space. But are we the body? We are the same now, then and forever.

Of course time and space are mere concepts in us. Because in our long journey in life we pass through multitudes of experiences, we have to conceive past, present and future in order to arrange them conveniently in their sequence of occurrence in our memory. Because we perceive multiplicity, we have to conceive a space in which to accommodate them, like the screen on which movie pictures are spread. Without a screen there can be no pictures. The screen on which the universe actually appears and moves is thus our own mind, from which it emanates as thoughts, either of external physical objects, or of internal concepts, sensations, emotions, including the senses of time and space.

Those who take themselves for the body take *time* to be the creator and destroyer of all things, and thus it inspires them with great fear — fear of future calamities, of death, of loss of fortune and position, or whatever it may be. Many of them consult astrologers to read the decrees of time and foretell events long in advance of their occurrence. To them birth, youth, old age and death; creation, preservation and dissolution; past, present and future; health and disease, prosperity and adversity all exist without the shadow of a doubt: they fall prey to time and its vagaries. The others who know themselves to be pure spirit are bodiless, timeless and spaceless; and Bhagavan affirms, they are thus free from the hallucination of “We alone are; time and space are not”.

17. To those who have not realized, the “I” is of the size of the body. To those who have, it is limitless.

To those who have not realized the Self, as well as to those who have, the body is “I”. To the form the “I” is only the size of the body; whereas to those who have realized the Self within the body, the “I” shines without limits. This is the difference between the two.

The *jnani* (the Self-realized) like everybody else, refers to the body as “I”. Whereas the others confine their “I” to the flesh and body and to its height and breadth, the *jnani* takes his “I” to be the life which pervades the body as well as the limitless space outside it. Realization is the direct and indubitable proof of this truth.

18. To those who have not realized, the world is confined to the space it occupies. To those who have, it is the limitless substratum of the world.

To those who have realized the Self and to those who have not, the world is real. To the latter its reality is confined to the spatial

measurements of the world, whereas to the former it is formless, and shines as the substratum of the world. This is the difference between the two.

The space which the world occupies is the limit of its reality to the ignorant (*ajnani*), but to the *jnani* it is the limitless substratum of the world. Science tells us that space is not material, that is, it is not made of atoms and molecules, like the objects which occupy it, to be visible to the eye. The perception of space by the eye is the worst illusion men suffer. Space is a mental concept, i.e. it is a project *by the mind to make the reality of the world plausible*. If space is a concept, so should be the objects that occupy it, notwithstanding their atoms and molecules. All the universes and galaxies in the Cosmos are made of atoms and nothing else. But what are atoms after all but the indestructible absolute energy? The *jnani* experiences this energy as the pure intelligence that is himself. The absolute reality is thus absolute energy as well as absolute energy as well as absolute consciousness — *Sat* as well as *Chit* – omnipotent, omnipresent as well as omniscient, the world as well as the creator and seer of the world.

19. Arguments about destiny and free-will are carried on by those who have not realized. Those who have, are free from both.

Disputations as to which prevails over the other, fate or free-will, are for those who have no knowledge of the Self, which is the ground of both fate and free-will. Those who have realized this ground are free from both. Will they be caught by them again?

Fate or destiny is karma. Karma, like free-will, is unintelligent, and can thus affect only the unintelligent in man, namely, the body, and not the intelligent being, how is the lord of the body. When realization of this is achieved, karma and free-will will have no feet to stand on and will crumble to dust of their own accord.

The scholar do not worry over whether destiny and free-will affect the individual or his body, but argue about which of them dominates the other in its operation. Our own approach to this question is simple. We exercise our will freely and let karma take care of itself. Vasishta Muni exhorts Rama

to make constant efforts in his *sadhana* and forget about all the complexities of destiny. He compares karma and free-will to two battling rams, of which the stronger will always win in the end. Thus strong efforts will overcome destiny.

Some theorists stretch themselves so far as to believe that even the exercise of the will is predestined, that is, destiny is always dominant, leaving no room for freedom of the will. If they are right, then religion, ethical conduct, obedience to moral laws, service of man and humane actions are wasted effort, and evil-doing will be on par with virtuous deeds. Moreover, men out be no better than machines which produce what is put into them, or than animals which are not responsible for their actions and thus, not liable to punishment or reward. Fortunately it is not so: the admission of punishment and reward, which is the fundamental condition in the operation of karma, inevitably leads to the admission of free-will. Karma begins to operate only after the will has been exercised *ad libitum*. The genesis is free-will not karma, which follows it like its shadow.

20. Seeing the Self is seeing God, so the Self is not other than God.

Without seeing the Self, the seeing of God is a mental image. Seeing the Self is seeing God, they say. Completely losing the ego and seeing the Self is finding God; for the Self is not other than God.

The Great Western religions hold that the question of whether there is a God other than man is sacrilegious. The supremacy of God over man, they argue, is so self-evident that the very question is derogatory to God Almighty. Bhagavan answers the question in the negative because, whereas the Western theologians take man to be the nearest dust, the corruptible body, Bhagavan takes him to be the spirit or life within the body, which is infinite and eternal.

Those who have no experience of the Self but claim to have seen God, Bhagavan asserts, have seen only their own mental picture of God resembling their own physical picture more or less, having a shape, color, size, etc. which God the pure Spirit simply does not have.

21. To see God is to be absorbed by God.

God is the Self, we said, but 'how to see one's own Self', which has no second to perceive or reflect it? Here seeing the Self is knowing the Self, the Self being pure knowledge, itself the seer and itself the seen. Knower and known are thus one and same being. Therefore seeing God is being dissolved in God or Self.

'Being single' draws attention to the freedom of man from his *upadhis* (adjuncts), which are anything but 'single' with their koshas, organs, faculties, and their manifold qualities such as shape, size, color, smell and taste. Therefore to be himself, that is to be 'single', man the ego had to shed all these superfluities which he has been mistaking for himself, and remain as consciousness in the heart. *That* is the true vision or true being of God.

22. God shines in the mind. But to know God the mind has to turn inward.

The Lord shines within the mind, illuminating it. Unless it turn inward and be fixed in the Lord, it is not possible for the mind to know Him.

Mind here is jiva which , working through its manas (the faculty of the lower intellect), perceives the world and remains always preoccupied with it. Being an intelligent knower, the jiva is not other than the Lord Himself, but because it is in constant contact with the world, it can have no knowledge of Him, or, what is the same, of itself. To have this knowledge, all it has to do is to turn its attention inwards to the Heart, where the Lord is seated. This is the same as renouncing the adjuncts mentioned in the last note.

23. Although the world disappears with the “I”, the “I” continues to exist in sleep as in waking.

The body does not say “I”. In sleep no one admits he is not. The “I” emerging, all else emerges. Inquire with a keen mind whence this “I” arises.

The body, being insentient, knows nothing about “I” and “not-I”, yet the “I” persists with or without a body – in the waking state or in sleep or swoon – as the man who himself wakes, swoons and sleeps. To know the true nature of this perennial “I”, we have to conduct an inquiry into its source.

24. Neither the body nor the Self says “I”: between them the ego rises and ties them together.

The insentient body does not say “I.” The ever-existent consciousness is not born (thus cannot say “I”). The “I” of the size of the body springs up between the two: it is known as *chit-jadagranthi* (the knot which ties together the sentient and insentient), bondage, individuality, ego, subtle body, *samsara*, mind, etc.

The body, unaware of its own existence, does not say “I”; and the Self which pure spirit, pure intelligence, has never come to and so, also, does not say “I.” But somehow the intelligence under the compelling power of *avidya* (ignorance) assumes a body, comes to identify itself with this body and to call itself “I,” thus tying together body and soul in a knot, which is known as the knot of ignorance in the heart – literally the sentience-insentience knot. It is an extremely hard knot which defies centuries of births, but breaks of its own accord when Self-realization is achieved, and bondage and ignorance are destroyed forever.

“*Samsara*” means going round on the wheel of birth and death. In India, the wife is significantly also called *samsara*.

25. The ego takes a body and accomplishes various acts. It takes one body after another till it is destroyed by vichara.

Know that this formless ghost (the ego or “I”) springs up in a form (body). Taking a form it lives, feeds and grows. Leaving a form it picks up another, but when it is inquired into, it drops the form and takes to flight.

The ego is a veritable ghost. A ghost is a disembodied spirit that takes on a shadowy appearance to play the living being and hoax people. The ego also is formless spirit – the *Atman* itself – but it picks up a body and; without knowing it; hoaxes others as well as itself. It begins its *samsaric* career by identifying itself with the body to enjoy the good things of the world. It reaps the retribution of falling into abysmal *avidya* (ignorance), losing memory of its true nature, and acquiring the false notions of having a birth, of acting, eating and growing, of accumulating wealth, marrying and begetting children, of being diseased; hungry and miserable and finally, of dying. But when the time of its redemption draws near, it undertakes an investigation of its real nature, sheds its identification with the body, transcends its previous illusions and becomes free once again, full of the bliss of self-discovery and self-knowledge (jnana).

26. The ego being the all, surrendering it is surrendering all

The ego existing, all else exists. The ego not existing, nothing else exists. The ego is thus all. Inquiring as to what the ego is, is therefore surrendering all.

Verse fourteen also makes the ego, or “I” the all. But here, we are led to draw the conclusion that true surrender is the surrender of the ego (which is the totality of the not-Self, or “everything”) and that the same surrender can be achieved by the method of *vichara* spoken of before.

27. To destroy the ego the source of its emergence has to be sought and retained as the real state.

The non-emergence of the “I” is the state of being THAT. Without seeking and attaining the place whence the “I” emerges, how is one to achieve self-extinction – the non-emergence of the “I”? Without that achievement, how is one to abide as THAT – one’s true state?

The non-emergence of the “I” means egolessness, the natural state of being or THAT. To stop the ego from rising we have to find the place of its emergence and annihilate it there, before it emerges, so that we may consciously ever abide as THAT, egoless, in the heart, as we unconsciously do in sleep. The word “place” stands here for Heart.

28. The seeking has to be deep within one-self like diving to recover a precious object that has fallen in deep waters.

Like the diver who dives to recover what has fallen into deep water, controlling speech and breath and with a keen mind, one must dive into himself and find whence the “I” emerges.

The basic theme of many of the previous verses, it must have been observed, is the *vichara*, through which the search for the ego’s source has to be made. Deep diving is a metaphor that implies salvaging the ego from the depths of ignorance into which it has fallen, not amateurishly but very expertly and unremittingly, or else success will be sporadic and even doubtful. Bhagavan means that this *sadhak*’s life should be dedicated to Realization and to nothing else, for who knows what obstacles destiny will raise against him to bar his march to the highest in future lives? So he asks us to turn into divers right now, controlling speech and breath. Breath-control is equivalent to mental silence (suspension of thoughts), which has to be practiced alongside the inquiry in order to train the mind to be alone, *kaivalya* (thought-

free), when it will perceive itself in its natural purity, the mot previous Self, “whence the I emerges.”

29. The vichara is not muttering “I” but sinking the mind into its source.

Seeking the source of the “I” with a mind turned inwards and no uttering of the word “I” is indeed the path of knowledge. Meditation on “I am not this, I am that” is an aid to the inquiry, but not the inquiry itself.

Bhagavan misses no opportunity of reminding us that the quest “who am I?” is not a formula to be repeated mechanically like an incantation, but an intellectual activity into the nature of the “I” which is carried out until its base is fully grasped and its source is reached. The whole process is dialectical, involving the exercise of the logical faculty, till it ends in the silence of the heart, which transcends all faculties. Some suggestive formula such as “I am THAT” may be used to being with, but in course of time it has to turn into an unshakable conviction, side by side with the stilling of the mind as mentioned in the previous commentary, which gradually grows in depth and duration. That is why the path of the *vichara* is known as the path of knowledge (*jnana marga*).

30. On reaching the heart, the “I” subsides and the real “I-I” manifests in its place.

Inquiring “Who am I?” within the mind, and reaching the heart, the “I” collapses. Instantly, the real “I” appears (as “I-I”), which although it manifests itself as “I” is not the ego, but the true being.

What happens to the “I” which has found its own source and collapsed? The meaning is that the “I” which has not been aware of its own reality has now, through inquiry, come face to face with it, and has turned from the notion of being a mortal body to the realization of being the shining sea of consciousness. This is the ‘collapse’ of the false “I” giving place to the true

“I”, which is eternally present as “I-I” — “I” without end or beginning. We must not forget that there is only one, secondless “I”, whether we view it as ego, totally sunk in the pleasures of the world and in ignorance, or as Self, the substratum and source of the world.

“Inquiring within the mind who am I?” is an affirmation once again, that the quest has to be carried out with the mind.

31. Having extinguished the ego the jnani has no other purpose in life but to remain immersed in the bliss of the Self.

What remains to be done by him, who, having extinguished the ego, remains immersed in the bliss of the Self? He is aware of nothing but the Self. Who can understand his state?

The purpose of all human endeavors, conscious or unconscious, is the gaining of happiness. The unwise seeks it outside himself in wealth, matrimony, high political and social positions, fame, worldly achievements and pleasure of all sorts. The wise knows that the happiness that comes from an outside cause is illusory due to its precarious nature and its inability even temporarily to confer contentment without trouble, fear, and endless anxiety. Lasting, undiluted happiness is one’s very nature, and thus within the grasp of anyone who earnestly seeks it. One who has gained this inner beatitude has no further actions to do, nor purpose to achieve. All his aspirations having been fulfilled, his sole preoccupation remains that ocean of bliss, which passes the understanding of the common man.

32. Although the Vedas say “Thou art THAT”, to not investigate into one’s nature and “abide as THAT” is mental weakness.

Despite the Vedas proclaiming “Thou art THAT”, it is sheer weak-mindedness not to investigate into the nature of oneself and abide as the Self, but instead to go on thinking “THAT I am, not this.”

The main point of this verse is that when the Vedas tell us that we are THAT, we are in duty bound to conduct an inquiry into ourselves in order to experience *the truth of it* and abide at THAT or the Self, rather than just mechanically thinking that we are not the body but THAT. Investigation and meditation will eventually rise above the body-thought, and will reach the *tanumanasi* state (the rarefied mind) through which the pure awareness can be directly apprehended. This is the silent heart itself.

33. Self-knowledge is not duality: the Self being single, it is itself both the object as well as the subject.

It is ludicrous to think “I know myself”, or “I do not know myself”, admitting thereby two selves, one the object of the other. That the Self is only one is the experience of all.

To know a thing is to create a duality – the knower and the known. But in self-knowledge there can be no duality, the known being the knower himself, the object and the subject being one and the same identify.

It is common experience that the “I” is unqualified and single: it is neither divisible into parts nor tainted by qualities. However fat or lean, old or young, learned or ignorant, rich or poor, whole or dismembered one may be, one is aware of oneself only as “I” devoid of any attributes. The bare “I”, “I”, “I” is the primary cognition of everyone, preceding the “mine” cognition, the body and all its appertenances, and all its thoughts. This shows that the Self is non-dual, homogeneous and indivisible, and can abide pure by itself with no thoughts to disturb it, being itself not a thought, but the intuitive recognition of oneself as the eternal knower, the pivot – more correctly, the substance – of all one knows. It is evident that the “I” being pure indivisible consciousness, is experienced by the *jnani* as the same in all.

34. Disputing the nature of the Self without attempting Self-realization merely constitutes delusion.

Without trying to realise in the heart that reality which is the true nature of all, and without trying to abide in it, to engage in disputations as to whether the reality exists or not, or is real or not, denotes delusion born of ignorance.

The theme of the previous verse continues. The realization of one's Self is the realization of the true nature of all else, the Self being single and homogeneous. Disputations deepen the ignorance and not infrequently lead to acrimony, anger, hatred, and jealousy among the disputants, not to speak of the vanity and arrogance they create in the hearts of the winners. They should thus be shunned by seekers of Truth and of Peace everlasting.

35. Thaumaturgic powers are like dream-magic: they do not entrap the Self-realized.

To seek and abide in that which is always attained is true attainment. All other attainments, such as *siddhis* (thaumaturgic powers), are like those acquired in dreams, which prove to be unreal on waking. Can they who are established in reality and are rid of illusions be ensnared by them?

Sometimes we dream that we are flying in the air, or leaping over precipices hundreds of feet wide, or stopping a running motor car with a light touch of the hand, or doing things which, in the waking state, would appear miraculous, yet prove unreal on waking. The *siddhis* exhibited in the waking state appear to the man who has freed himself from illusion exactly like the dream miracles — utterly false. The greatest of all miracles and all *siddhis* is the discovery of and eternal abidance in, oneself.

In the olden days occasionally a *siddhi*-mad youth used to come to Ramanasram with the intention of using Bhagavan's presence to promote the success of his pursuit of *siddhis*. One or two of them were reasonable enough to listen to the advice of the devotees and quit the Ashram before it was too

late.¹ But one, more persistent than the others, continued to interfere with his uvula and the posterior membrane of his tongue, ignoring all advice to desist, until after two or three weeks his people had to be called to take him away. These were lucky to be saved from the pitfalls of *siddhis*. Many others had their *siddhis* turned on them like boomerangs adversely affecting their physical and mental constitutions. *Siddhis* come naturally to the very few, due to yogic practices carried out during their previous *sadhana* and *karmic* determinations. These people are safe and sometimes helpful to humanity, if they behave reasonably in the *sadhana* of this life. They are likely to attain *mukti* if they are lucky and favorably disposed — *sattvic* in other words.

“That which is always attained” refers to the Self, which is always present at the true nature of the ego whether ego is conscious of it or not (see comment on verse 30) before the birth of the body, during its existence and after its disintegration at death.

36. It is not necessary to go on meditating ‘I am THAT’, for one always is THAT.

The thought “I am not the body” helps one to meditate “I am not this: I am THAT” and to abide as THAT. But why should one forever think “I am THAT”? Does a man need to always think “I am a man”? We are always THAT.

Verse thirty-two discourages the use of the thought “I am not this”. However, this verse avers that even this negative meditation is useful to the extent that it leads to the positive meditation “I am THAT”. But even the latter meditation appears to the jnani superfluous, in that it is already granted that one is always THAT — “That which is always attained” (verse thirty-five). That we are not the body any thinking man can discover for himself without even attempts at Self-realization. For what dullard can find no difference between himself and, say, a chair or table which does not move, think or speak like him, yet is made of the same elements? There must certainly be something in the human body, over and above what there is in the other objects. That something is life, or mind, or knowledge, or THAT,

¹Cohen said “... quit the Ashram betimes”, but because I am favoring American English over British, I translated it.

which *sadhakas* try to isolate from the body and perceive by itself, in its aloneness (*kaivalya*). That is the Self-realization or self-cognition we are after.

37. Non-duality prevails always, whether as the world or as the Self.

The theory that in practical life duality prevails, whereas non-duality prevails in the (spiritual) attainment, is false. Whether one is still anxiously searching for the Self, or has actually attained it, one is not other than the tenth man.

Non-duality always prevails, whether viewed from the viewpoint of the world or from that of the realized yogi. The realization of Self cannot turn the dual into the non-dual. The truth of non-duality stands eternally true, as verse one has shown.

The *tenth man* refers to the story in which ten men travelled together. After fording a river, they decided to count themselves to make sure that none of them had been lost in the crossing. The man who counted his nine companions forgot to count himself, which resulted in their starting a search for the tenth man — actually always present as the counter himself. The same applies to man, who is always present as the eternal non-dual reality, but imagines himself always in duality due to his perception of multiplicity — “I” and “you”, the chair, the door, the window and a million other objects. But the realized man is free from this false imagination: he knows himself to be the tenth man.

38. The sense of doership reaps the fruits of action (karma): karma ends when the doer realizes his true nature.

So long as a man feels himself the doer, he reaps the fruits of his actions. But as soon as he realizes through inquiry who is the doer, the sense of doership drops off and the threefold karma comes to an end. This is the final Liberation.

Who is the doer? If the body is the doer then we have to attribute intelligence to it, an intelligence which it does not possess. The identification of the instrument of an act with the actor is the cause of much trouble. An illustration will be to the point. A man has a grudge against another man and plans to do away with him. He waylays him on a dark night, takes a stone and kills him with it. Who is the killer? Certainly not the stone, although it is the stone that has done the evil deed, nor is the hand which holds the stone, nor the body of which the hand is a part, and which is as insentient, and there as innocent, as the stone. It is the mind which, with hatred, planned and executed the crime, using the instrumentality of the body and the stone. Therefore the mind is the empirical man, or ego who, so long as he believes himself to be the actor, has to reap, the fruit of his actions effected through a body. But this belief, like the ego itself, is not permanent: it passes away immediately an inquiry is made into the identity of the doer.

The triple karma which hangs around the neck of the doer is made up of the *sanchita* (accumulated karma), the *prarabdha* (the karma which is destined to be worked out in this birth), and the *agami* (the karma which becomes active in future births). The last class of karma will remain unfulfilled in the case of the person who has attained Liberation in the present body, and who will have no other births for karma to be worked in.

Questions are sometimes asked concerning the *jnani's prarabdha* as to why it does not cease with his attainment of *jnana*, thus sparing him suffering that may arise in the form of virulent disease, with which some famous *jnanis* are known to be burdened. The answer is that *prarabdha* of the *jnani* had been allotted to him at or before birth, when he was still liable to the working of karma prior to his attainment of *jnana*. As for his suffering, it is not as painful to him as it appears to others: it is greatly mitigated by the Realization which unceasingly wells up in his heart.

Some Biblically-oriented Westerners seem to think that the suffering of the *jnani* is due to his taking upon himself the sins of his disciples. Vedanta denies to transfer of sins and its responsibilities. Strict justice is the law of karma which tolerates no one to suffer for another's crimes, least of all a Guru, who comes to show the way to Truth. Far from being punished he is rewarded by the service, love and devotion of the disciples. Thus the belief in a Salvation through the vicarious suffering of the Master is totally unacceptable in this path, where each man is regarded as working out his own liberation through hard word, self-purification, worship of the Guru,

self-control, spiritual practices and a full sense of moral responsibility. In the whole Vedantic literature one does not find a single reference to the transference of sins, but always to karma.

39. Bondage and Liberation are mere notions in the mind: they cease when he who is bound is inquired into and realized.

Bondage and Liberation exist so long as thoughts of bondage and liberation exist. These come to an end when an inquiry is made into the nature of he who is bound or free, and the ever-present and ever-free Self is realized.

This has a close resemblance to the last verse, which makes the sense of doership to be the cause of karma. Likewise the sense of being bound or free makes bondage and liberation exist. Thus wrong notions about oneself are responsible for all the acts of destiny: birth, death, bondage, ignorance, etc. But wrong notions can be rectified by right knowledge, which can be had only through and inquiry into the nature of the person who is the victim of wrong notions. Then his real Self will reveal itself and will dispel all notions, all senses, and all thoughts, including the sense and thought of *jivahood* (individuality) itself.

40. True Liberation has no form, and destroys the very ego which distinguishes between one kind of it and another.

It is said that Liberation is with form or without form, or with and without form. Let me tell you that Liberation destroys all three as well as the ego which distinguishes between them.

All these forms of liberation, some of which are said to take place in a disembodied state in some supersensuous worlds — *Vaikuntha*, *Satyaloka*, etc. are hypothetical. At best they offer encouragement to the *sadhakas* who are partial to them. The fact of the matter is that true and absolute

Liberation results only from *jnana* (knowledge of the Absolute), which alone can destroy ignorance, either in this body or in one of the following bodies. For there are no planes or states of consciousness where radical salvation is possible, other than the waking state, i.e., in a body, where bondage and ignorance are felt and attempts for redemption made; least of all in the state of after-death where there is no body to feel the limitations and retributions of karma.

Therefore he who aspires to reach the highest has to exert himself hard here and now, preferably by the *vichara* method which Bhagavan has so graciously propounded and so often reiterated in these verses. The determined *sadhaka* will not fail to verify these truths by his own experience if he puts them to the test, full of confidence, in his own self and the unfailing silent support of the Master, who is not other than the very Reality he is so earnestly seeking, and who ever and ever abides in his own heart as Existence, Consciousness and Bliss — *Sat Chit Ananda*.

OM SHANTI SHANTI SHANTIHI

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Postscript

I, Terrence Monroe Brannon, decided that there needed to be a freely available version of the one book which summarizes Advaita Vedanta. I first learned of this text in my dealings with the late, great guru Arunachala Ramana and his spiritual institute AHAM.com

I will never forget the power of this guru to evoke change in consciousness right over the phone by doing nothing but SPEAKING THE TRUTH. Truly an amazing person who gave all of his spiritual services at way less than current going rates.

Caveats

Verse 30: “I-I”

There is an unusual terminology used by Cohen, and also by current students of Ramana Maharishi. In standard English, the word “I” (first person singular) is never sequenced with itself, such as they do in verse 30 — “I-I”. I’ve heard current students in this lineage repeat this verbage, namely Stan at AHAM.com. I reworded this unusual term to put a dash between the two instances of “I” so that they are more joined than they were with Cohen’s typography. Hopefully this eliminates some confusion, but I still don’t know what they mean by this unusual term. Perhaps it is similar to L. Rob Hubbard’s definition of a Thetan as “the awareness of awareness unit.”

British English gone

I took the liberty of changing British English to American English but didn’t do so consistently.

Also, I changed the word 'cinematograph' to 'movie' in verse 16. I'm not sure if 'cinematograph' is old-school American English or British English, but it didn't read as well as 'movie' so being the egotist I am, I changed it.

Synopsis more readable

Also the synopsis of verse 32 was edited a bit by me to be more readable. S.S. Cohen wrote it as:

32. Although "Thou art THAT", say the Vedas, not to investigate into one's nature and "abide as THAT" is mental weakness.

I changed it to:

32. Although the Vedas say "Thou art THAT", to not investigate into one's nature and "abide as THAT" is mental weakness.

I think verse 19's synopsis could also be better worded, but with a bit of brow crunching, you will be able to figure it out.

Added an index

I also created a small index even though Cohen thought one wasn't needed. In fact, he's probably right, there is one single goal in self-realization and mind-food such as an index is heading in the direction of the many as opposed to The One. However, in defense of the index, the whole purpose of these 40 verses (IMHO) is to cut out any and all forms of self-deception at their root. So hopefully the index will lead the inquirer to the right verse more easily this way.

Feedback/corrections are welcome:

- TheQuietCenter@gmail.com
- <http://www.LivingCosmos.org>

or download the LaTeX source yourself:

- <https://github.com/metaperl/reality-in-40-verses>

Back Cover

A twentieth century Master of Advaita discourses on the discovery of that Absolute Reality from which all things proceed, and which is also a person's own real Self. The translation and commentaries are by one who knew him and lived close to him for many years.

SRI RAMANASRAMAM

TIRUVANNAMALI

S. INDIA